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Abraham Lincoln

LEGISLATOR

ORATOR

PRESIDENT

Never a Prohibitionist

Abraham Lincoln A Temperance Orator

From His Address before the Springfield Washingtonian Temperance Society, February 22, 1842.

* * * "The warfare heretofore waged against the demon intemperance has somehow or other been erroneous. * * *

Too much denunciation against dram-sellers and dram-drinkers was indulged in. This I think was both impolitic and unjust. It was impolitic, because it is not much in the nature of man to be driven to anything; still less to be driven about that which is exclusively his own business; and least of all where such driving is to be submitted to at the expense of pecuniary interest or burning appetite. When the dram-seller and drinker were incessantly told---not in accents of intreaty and persuasion, diffidently addressed by erring man to an erring brother, but in the thundering tones of anathema and denunciation * * * that they were the authors of all the vice and misery and crime in the land; that they were the manufacturers and material of all the thieves and robbers and murderers that infect the earth; that their houses were the workshops of the devil; and that their persons should be shunned by all the good and virtuous, as moral pestilences---I say, when they were told all this, and in this way, it is not wonderful that they were slow, very slow, to acknowledge the truth of such denunciations, and to join the ranks of their denouncers in a hue and cry against themselves.

To have expected them to do otherwise than they did---to have expected them not to meet denunciation with denunciation, crimination with crimination, and anathema with anathema---was to expect a reversal of human nature, which is God's decree and can never be reversed.

When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. * * * When all such of us as have now reached the years of maturity first opened our eyes upon the stage of existence, we found intoxicating liquor recognized by everybody, used by everybody, repudiated by nobody. It commonly entered into the first draught of the infant and the last draught of the dying man. From the sideboard of the parson down to the ragged pocket of the houseless loafer, it was constantly found. Physicians prescribed it in this, that, and the other disease; government provided it for soldiers and sailors; and to have a rolling or raising, a husking or 'hoedown' anywhere without it was positively insufferable. So, too, it was everywhere a respectable article of manufacture and merchandise. The making of it was regarded as an honorable livelihood, and he who could make most was the most enterprising and respectable. Large and small manufactories of it were everywhere erected, in which all the earthly goods of the owners were invested. Wagons drew it from town to town; boats bore it from clime to clime, and the winds wafted it from nation to nation; and merchants bought and sold it, by wholesale and retail with precisely the same feelings on the part of the seller, buyer and bystander as are felt at the selling and buying of plows, beef, bacon, or any other of the real necessities of life. Universal public opinion not only tolerated, but recognized and adopted its use.

It is true that even then it was known and acknowledged that many were greatly injured by it; but *none seemed to think the injury arose from the use of a bad thing, but from the abuse of a very good thing.* * * *"

OLLIE HARDEN  PRINTER